

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Last Convoy of American Troops Leaves Iraq, Marking an End to the War

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BAGHDAD — The last convoy of American troops to leave Iraq drove into Kuwait on Sunday morning, marking the end of the nearly nine-year war.

Soldiers in armored vehicles left Contingency Operating Base Adder, near the southern city of Nasiriyah, as part of the last American military convoy to leave the country.

The convoy's departure, which included about 110 vehicles and 500 soldiers, came three days after the American military folded its flag in a muted ceremony here to celebrate the end of its mission.

In darkness, the convoy snaked out of Contingency Operating Base Adder, near the southern city of Nasiriyah, around 2:30 a.m., and headed toward the border. The departure appeared to be the final moment of a drawn-out withdrawal that included weeks of ceremonies in Baghdad and around Iraq, and included visits by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, as well as a trip to Washington by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq.

As dawn approached on Sunday morning, the last trucks began to cross over the border into Kuwait at an outpost lit by floodlights and secured by barbed wire.

"I just can't wait to call my wife and kids and let them know I am safe," said Sgt. First Class Rodolfo Ruiz just before his armored vehicle crossed over the border. "I am really feeling it now."

Shortly after crossing into Kuwait, Sergeant Ruiz told the men in his vehicle: "Hey guys, you made it."

Then, he ordered the vehicles in his convoy not to flash their lights or honk their horns.

For security reasons, the last soldiers made no time for goodbyes to Iraqis with whom they had become acquainted. To keep details of the final trip secret from insurgents, interpreters for the last unit to leave the base called local tribal sheiks and government leaders on Saturday morning and conveyed that business would go on as usual, not letting on that all the Americans would soon be gone.

Many troops wondered how the Iraqis, whom they had worked closely with and trained over the past year, would react when they awoke on Sunday to find that the remaining American troops on the base had left without saying anything.

"The Iraqis are going to wake up in the morning and nobody will be there," said a soldier who only identified himself as Specialist Joseph. He said he had immigrated to the United States from Iraq in 2009 and enlisted a year later, and refused to give his full name because he worried for his family's safety.

Fearing that insurgents would try to attack the last Americans leaving the country, the military treated all convoys like combat missions.

As the armored vehicles drove through the desert, Marine, Navy and Army helicopters and planes flew overhead scanning the ground for insurgents and preparing to respond if the convoys were attacked.

Col. Douglas Crissman, one of the military's top commanders in southern Iraq, said in an interview on Friday that he planned to be in a Blackhawk helicopter over the convoy with special communication equipment.

“It is a little bit weird,” he said, referring to how he had not told his counterparts in the Iraqi military when they were leaving. “But the professionals among them understand.”

Over the past year, Colonel Crissman and his troops spearheaded the military’s efforts to ensure the security of the long highway that passes through southern Iraq that a majority of convoys traveled on their way out of the country.

“Ninety-five percent of what we have done has been for everyone else,” Colonel Crissman said.

Across the highway, the military built relationships with 20 tribal sheiks, paying them to clear the highway of garbage, making it difficult for insurgents to hide roadside bombs in blown-out tires and trash.

Along with keeping the highway clean, the military hoped that the sheiks would help police the highway and provide intelligence on militants.

“I can’t possibly be all places at one time,” said Colonel Crissman in an interview in May. “There are real incentives for them to keep the highway safe. Those sheiks we have the best relationships with and have kept their highways clear and safe will be the most likely ones to get renewed for the remainder of the year.”

All American troops were legally obligated to leave the country by the end of the month, but President Obama, in announcing in October the end of the American military role here, promised that everyone would be home for the holidays.

The United States will continue to play a role in Iraq. The largest American embassy in the world is located here, and in the wake of the military departure it is doubling in size — from about 8,000 people to 16,000 people, most of them contractors. Under the authority of the ambassador will be less than 200 military personnel, to guard the embassy and oversee the sale of weapons to the Iraqi government.

History’s final judgment on the war, which claimed nearly 4,500 American lives and cost almost \$1 trillion, may not be determined for decades. But it will be forever tainted by the early missteps and miscalculations, the faulty intelligence over Saddam Hussein’s weapons programs and his supposed links to terrorists, and a litany of American abuses, from the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal to a public shootout involving Blackwater mercenaries that left civilians dead — a sum of agonizing factors that diminished America’s standing in the Muslim world and its power to shape events around the globe.

When President George W. Bush announced the start of the war in 2003 in an address from the Oval Office, he proclaimed, “we will accept no outcome but victory.”

But the end appears neither victory, nor defeat, but a stalemate — one in which the optimists say violence has been reduced to a level that will allow the country to continue on its lurching path toward stability and democracy, and the pessimists say the American presence has been a bandage on a festering wound.

The war’s conclusion marks a political triumph for President Obama, who ran for office promising to bring the troops home, but is bittersweet for Iraqis who will now face on their own the unfinished legacy of a conflict that rid their country of a hated dictator but did little else to improve their lives.

Source: New York Times

Reflection ideas:

Was the decision to leave without informing the Iraqis a sound one?

What might become of Iraq without the American presence?

What will “History’s final judgment of the [Iraq] war” be?